



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Stephen D. Isler

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jason W. Papanikolas (Mayor Pro Tem)
Amanda M. Dewey
Jeffrey Jay Osmond
Ethan D. Sweep

Town Meeting Minutes May 13, 2020 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency, which prohibits large gatherings and advises Marylanders to remain socially distant. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone and email.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. Present were Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jason Papanikolas, presiding, Councilmembers (CMs) Amanda Dewey, Jeffrey Jay Osmond, and Ethan Sweep. Mayor Stephen Isler had an excused absence. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Chief Kenneth Antolik, Detective Daniel Unger, Code Director Hollyce Goodwin, Public Works Clerk Rosalie Jones, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper and prospective Green Team members Genevieve de Messieres and Jenny Coral.

MPT Papanikolas led the Pledge of Allegiance and explained the virtual meeting rules.

1. Approval of the Agenda

MPT Papanikolas asked to strike the Mayor's Report since Mayor Isler was absent. CM Dewey moved to approve the agenda as amended. CM Sweep seconded. The motion passed 4 to 0.

2. Appointment of Green Team Members

CM Dewey introduced Genevieve de Messieres and Jenny Coral who have been nominated to join the Green Team. CM Dewey moved and CM Osmond seconded to appoint Ms. de Messieres and Coral. The motion passed 4 to 0.

3. Ceremonial Items

Arbor Day Proclamation: MPT Papanikolas read the Proclamation. CM Dewey said the Proclamation is part of the annual renewal of Town's Tree City USA status as well as its Sustainable Maryland re-certification.

Howard Johnson's 99th Birthday Proclamation: MPT Papanikolas said last Saturday the Town celebrated long-time resident Howard Johnson's 99th Birthday with a drive-by parade that included the Berwyn Heights Town Council, Police and Volunteer Fire Department and many residents. He read a proclamation honoring Howard Johnson.

4. Public Hearings

FY 2021 General Fund Budget: MPT Papanikolas said the record has been kept open for comments since introduction of the budget at the April 15 Town meeting and asked whether Council or staff has received any comments. No comments have been received.

At 7:28 p.m., MPT Papanikolas opened the hearing on the FY 2021 General Fund Budget. Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Ruatan Street, commented via telephone. She expressed disappointment that no changes have been made to lower the Town's tax rate. As a result, Town residents will pay higher taxes next year, due to rising assessments, during a time when many are experiencing a loss in income. She hopes the Town will advertise the option for low income residents to apply for a tax credit. She is heartened by steps taken to ensure the Town has the reserves to deal with potential impacts from an economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 closures and layoffs.

At 7:31 p.m., MPT Papanikolas closed the hearing.

FY 2021 Public Safety Taxing District Budget: MPT Papanikolas opened the hearing in the FY 2021 Public Safety Taxing District (PSTD) Budget at 7:32 p.m.

Jodie Kulpa-Eddy commented that actual expenditures for the FY 2019 and FY 2020 PSTD budgets were not listed in the May Bulletin budget pages and asked if they are available. TM Broadbent replied she does not have the figures at hand.

Ms. Kulpa-Eddy also asked whether possible revenue losses due to COVID-19 business closures might make it difficult to fund the salary and outfitting of a police officer previously funded through the PSTD Budget. TM Broadbent said the PSTD Budget has not been adjusted for COVID-19 impacts, but the General Fund Budget was. If shortfalls develop with respect to a particular revenue source, the Council would amend the budget to reflect that. As it stands, the Town has the reserves to absorb some such losses and simply would forgo some purchases if there is not enough money in the bank.

At 7:39 p.m., MPT Papanikolas closed the hearing.

5. Approval of Minutes

The March 28 budget worksession minutes and the April 15 Town meeting minutes were adopted by unanimous consent.

6. Department Reports

MPT Papanikolas asked for a motion to receive all department reports for the record. CM Sweep so moved. CM Dewey seconded. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Administration: MPT Papanikolas said that the Town has entered the 8th week of the COVID-19 health emergency, which requires residents to remain socially distant. Many tasks are now done remotely, including holding meetings, voting, paying bills and enforcing codes. Kudos go to Police and Public Works employees who continue to be out on the streets to keep the Town clean and pick up the trash.

TM Broadbent thanked Treasurer Rodriguez for her work on the budget and appreciated all employees for continuing to work during the state of emergency. She is looking forward to welcoming the Seniors back but thinks the Senior Center will not be open before Labor Day, given the high number of COVID-19 cases in Prince George's County.

Treasurer Rodriguez said she appreciates all employees for continuing to work, but especially thanked Public Works for keeping their work done with a limited number of staff.

Code Compliance: CM Osmond said he is happy to hear that Town departments continue normal operations as much as possible. He believes maintaining a sense of normalcy during difficult times is important.

Parks, Recreation, Education & Civic Affairs: CM Dewey also thanked Town staff for continuing to take care of the Town and appreciated everyone who organized and participated in a birthday parade for Howard Johnson last Saturday. Recreation Council President Susan Jones is commended for organizing musicians to perform music in the street as an alternative to Berwyn Heights Day. Summer concerts are being planned as virtual events. Lastly, CM Dewey said the State of Maryland is moving forward with stage 1 for reopening, but that Prince George's County will be reopening on a different schedule. Residents are encouraged to check the County and Town websites for updates.

Public Works: MPT Papanikolas said he heard from multiple residents about the great job Public Works is doing with removing trash and responding to special requests for refuse pickups. CM Sweep said he likewise has heard from residents that they are thankful for Public Works and the Police continuing to take care of the Town.

CM Sweep commented on May being 'Mental Health Awareness Month'. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that over 50% of people say the coronavirus health emergency and related stay-at-home orders have negatively impacted their mental health. People struggling with depression and anxiety should know they are not alone and can get help and support. He suggested several ways to combat depression and places to get help, such as the National Suicide Prevention hotline at 1-800-273-8255 and other national and local mental health and substance abuse services.

Public Safety: Chief Antolik thanked Clerk Muralles for pushing information about the health emergency out on social media and all his employees for coming in to work every day. It took some time for officers to get used to wearing masks and goggles when interacting with perpetrators, but they are now used to it. A couple of people have been arrested for violating the Governor's executive orders, and there has been an uptick in theft from vehicles.

In response to CM Dewey, Chief Antolik said the Police are aware of people racing on Greenbelt Road and Kenilworth Avenue. Berwyn Heights, Greenbelt and State police are monitoring the situation and are enforcing speeding and related violations of the emergency orders. Residents should call BHPD if they are witnessing racing.

7. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: CM Dewey said the Education Advisory Committee has pivoted to sharing information about educational changes in the school system due to COVID-19. The BHEAC plans to meet in June but is not sure whether it will be in person. Residents should check the Town website for confirmation.

Green Team: CM Dewey said the Green Team is busy working on the Town's second Sustainable Maryland recertification. The Committee is also re-running its Trees of Distinction program as part of celebrating Arbor Day and adapted a planned summer scholars' program to the COVID-19 emergency. Students and their families can complete a number of sustainability-related activities at home or in a

socially distant manner to earn points and prizes. Details will be published in the Bulletin and the Green Team's website. The Green Team will meet on May 14, 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Historical Committee: There was no report

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: There was no report.

Recreation Council: CM Dewey said the Recreation Council is trying to come up with creative ways to safely bring the community together. A virtual concert is being planned for June.

8. Unfinished Business

Ordinance 181 – 2nd Reading & Adoption of FY 2021 General Fund Budget: The reading of the Ordinance was dispensed with. MPT Papanikolas opened the floor for Councilmembers to discuss the FY 2021 budget.

CM Sweep said the budget was discussed in depth at previous meetings. He would only add he is happy that needed improvements to the Public Works facility have remained in the budget.

CM Dewey said the overall approach to this budget was to budget only for things necessary to provide essential Town services and to protect the reserves and rainy-day fund. The Council is aware of the struggles families are facing and mindful of protecting resources to keep everyone safe and healthy.

CM Osmond said the Council is continuing to figure out how to improve budgeting, such as giving line items to every expense category and not to using reserves for operating expenses. He appreciates TM Broadbent's and Treasurer Rodriguez' fiscal discipline and providing detailed information throughout the budget process. The Council recognizes the challenge coming from rising property assessments but believes it is better to have rising than falling property values. A Homeowners Tax Credit (HTC) program was adopted to assist resident who may have difficulties paying their property taxes. He supports increased funds being spent on the Comcate system, which helps to streamline Code operations, Code uniforms for professional appearance and vehicle maintenance.

MPT Papanikolas said, as the manager of Anne Arundel County's American Job Center, he has seen tens of thousands of people file for unemployment benefits. He is sensitive to the hardships they face from loss of income and rising taxes. On the other hand, residents expect a certain level of services and the cost of providing these services to increase, regardless of the pandemic. MPT Papanikolas echoed earlier comments that the Council approached this budget with the intent to protect the reserves in order to be able to weather a worst-case scenario from the fallout of pandemic. The Council has also postponed some programmed expenses to the end of the year to make sure there is money in the bank to pay for them. Some of the big-ticket items, such as road repairs and Public Works vehicles are paid for with State funds and dedicated reserves that cannot be used for other things.

With no further comments, CM Sweep moved, and CM Osmond seconded to approve the FY 2021 budget. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Ordinance 182 – 2nd Reading & Adoption of Public Safety Taxing District Budget: MPT Papanikolas opened the floor to Councilmembers comments. CM Dewey said that this budget supports better cooperation between the Town's businesses and the Police. She believes it is important that this continue.

CM Osmond said he likes that the Public Safety Taxing District (PSTD) budget provides funds for officer training and attending conferences and asked what happens with these funds if they are not spent. Treasurer Rodriguez said that unexpended funds remain in this budget, which has its own bank account, as a reserve. They can be used for training in the next fiscal year if appropriated for that purpose.

CM Sweep moved to approve Ordinance 182. CM Osmond seconded. The motion passed 4 to 0.

9. New Business

Resolution 06-2020 – Approval of Contract for Police Station Feasibility Study: Clerk Harper read the Resolution. MPT Papanikolas welcomed Robert Manns, Principal Architect of Manns Woodward Studios, and opened the floor for discussion of the feasibility study proposal submitted by Manns Woodward.

Mr. Manns answered Councilmembers questions about architectural style and environmental design, receiving input from the Council and the community, and the process and timeline for the study. He said Manns Woodward Studios has over 20 years of experience designing mostly public safety buildings, ranging from very small to very large facilities and including the Berwyn Heights Fire Department. Completion time of the study depends largely on how fast the Council can give feedback, but realistically between 2 ½ to 3 months. His firm is equipped to share findings and plans and receive feedback via video conference.

Chief Antolik commented, so far, his interactions with Manns Woodward have been very positive and he hopes the study will eventually result in the Police being housed in a better facility. The current rented offices have many maintenance and security defects and are not conducive operating a police department.

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, called to ask what the Town is getting out of the \$40,000 study. TM Broadbent said this study seeks to determine what the options are for getting the Police into a better facility. Mr. Manns elaborated that the study seeks to 1) assess what the Town's needs are; 2) determine whether a building that fits those needs can go on the Town Center site; 3) determine the different ways it can fit on this site and which way offers the best efficiency and value; and 4) produce schematic floor plans and renderings to visualize what the structure might look like. The study does not include a set of engineering drawings that can be used for a bidding process.

Mr. Attick further asked whether the study will come up with a square foot price for the police station. Mr. Mann's said the cost would vary considerably depending on which features the Town wants to be included in the station. For example, a holding cell would greatly increase the square foot cost of the building. At the end of the process, a ballpark figure will be available.

CM Osmond asked whether Manns Woodward could produce an option for siting the police station on a property to be purchased, if it turns out that the cost of upgrading the Town hall is very high. Mr. Manns replied this is what his firm would recommend if building on the existing site is not cost effective. Mr. Attick commented that a resident offered to sell the Town a part of his property located near the Town Center several years ago.

With no further comments, CM Sweep moved, and CM Osmond seconded to award the contract for the police station feasibility study to Manns Woodward Studios. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Election update: Clerk Harper gave an update on the Town Council election, which was postponed to June 9, and will be held by mail due to the COVID-19 health emergency. Residents can expect to receive their absentee ballots in the mail the week of May 18. Candidates Night will be held on May 27. Resident Harold Whitaker has agreed to moderate the event, regardless of whether it is held via Zoom or not. Election Day will be June 9, with tallying taking place in the 2nd floor of the Town Center. The count will be broadcast over BHTV and streamed on the Town website. The swearing in of the new Council will take place the following day, on June 10.

In response to questions, Clerk Harper said the returned ballots will be collected daily and stored in a safe room. Ballot drop-off ends at 7 p.m. on June 9, at which time a last check of the drop-off box will be made. For Candidates Night, candidates who do not have computers at home can be accommodated in the Town office. TM Broadbent said emergency regulations forbid any large gathering at the Town office and those running should join the video conference meeting from their homes if possible.

CM Dewey suggested asking the Community Center to modify their electronic sign messages to add the date for the Town Council election so there is no confusion with the June 2 primary election. She also suggested giving candidates the option to submit statements ahead of time or to join Candidates Night by phone instead of coming into the Town office.

10. Citizen Discussion

Mike Attick asked how residents can distinguish the Town ballot envelope from the County's. Clerk Harper replied that the Town's envelope will be smaller and carries the Town seal. Mr. Attick gave a retrospective of the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee, thanked the Council for funding a replacement trailer and noted that some of the supplies stored in the trailer have been used in this health emergency.

Jodie Kulpa-Eddy asked when completed ballots should be mailed to reach the Town office by June 9, whether candidates may send in an updated version of their bio for the June Bulletin, and how residents can participate in Candidates Night. She was told that ballots returned by mail should be mailed a week prior to June 9 to be received in time or be dropped off at the Town office. Updated versions of the candidates' bios can be submitted until Friday. Residents can participate in Candidates Night by watching it on BHTV and calling by telephone. Alternatively, they can submit questions by email ahead of time as well as during the event. Ms. Kulpa-Eddy further commented that she is glad to see the police station feasibility study, which was first funded by the previous Council, is moving forward, and commended CM Sweep for giving out information on mental health resources.

Mike Attick suggested that members of Town organizations might help pick up ballots from residents and deliver them to the Town office. He was told that could be regarded as election fraud and may also violate social distancing rules.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:02 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk